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ABSTRACT

A practicum addressed fifth and sixth graders' deficiencies in writing and comprehension skills with the implementation of diagnostic-prescriptive teaching techniques. The Multi Level Academic Skills Inventory and interest inventories aided in defining students' specific strengths and weaknesses in the areas of reading and language arts. Among the teaching strategies used to bring about improvement of writing skills were different mapping strategies, peer learning, the process writing method, and critical thinking activities, such as brainstorming. Progress was monitored through charting daily timed samples of student performance. Results indicated increased levels of achievement for the targeted students. (Eight tables of data are included. Eleven appendixes contain sample assignments, a daily progress chart, and a sample task sheet.) (SR)

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Title Page

THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHING THE MAIN IDEA, DRAWING CONCLUSIONS, AND MAKING INFERENCES ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF WRITING SKILLS

by

DONNA G. COVEY

A Final Practicum Report

submitted to the Faculty of the Center for the Advancement of Education of Nova University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science.

August/1991

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Abstract

The Influence of Teaching The Main Idea, Drawing Conclusions, and Making Inferences on The Improvement of Writing Skills.
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Descriptors: Teaching Methods/ Learning Strategies/ Instructional Effectiveness/ Critical Thinking/ Writing/ Writing Skills/ Elementary Education/ Grade 6/ Grade 7/ Reading/ Reading Skills/ Reading Readiness/ Reading Processes/ Reading Writing Relationship/ Main Idea/

Students deficient in writing and comprehension skills within the targeted population of fifth and sixth grade students were addressed by the implementation of diagnostic-prescriptive teaching techniques. The Multi Level Academic Skills Inventory (MASI) and interest inventories aided in defining the targeted students' specific strengths and weaknesses in the areas of reading and language arts. Teaching strategies were chosen accordingly. Among the strategies used to bring about an improvement of the writing skills were different mapping strategies, the use of peer learning, the process writing method and critical thinking activities, such as brainstorming. Progress was monitored through charting daily timed samples of student performance. Results indicated increased levels of achievement for the targeted students. Appendices include sample assignments, daily progress charts, and a sample task sheet.

Authorship Statement

I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. When it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give this testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other professionals in the field and in the hope that my own work, presented here, will earn similar respect.

Signed: Donna G Covey
Student's Name

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CHAPTER I

Purpose

School and Community Setting

The setting for this practicum was a second campus of a private school located directly on a university campus. Upper-middle class families made up the population surrounding the school.

There were 19 practicum students participating in a remedial tutoring program comprised of three educational leaders, three computer science teachers, and 13 classroom teachers. There were 59 children enrolled in the program ranging in levels from kindergarten through eighth grade.

Under the supervision of trained professionals from the private school, the 19 practicum students practiced diagnostic-prescriptive Precision Teaching techniques. Tutoring sessions lasted three hours a day, five days a week, for a period of eight weeks during the summer of 1990.

Academic tests were administered during the first week of the program. The Multi Level Academic Skills Inventory (MASI) defined the children's specific

strengths and weaknesses in the areas of reading and language arts. Information as to the students' interests was gathered through interest inventories in order to plan lessons accordingly. The target population was comprised of fifth and sixth graders who were deficient in reading and writing skills.

Student Profiles

Kyle, a fifth grade student, attended a local public school. Scoring of the MASI test yielded similar results to the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery Test scores. The reading cluster measuring letter-word identification, word attack and passage comprehension revealed a 2.4 grade score. The written language subtest measured punctuation, word usage, and spelling and revealed a 2.8 grade score. Baseline data scores revealed the following:

Table 1

Skill	Level	Criteria for Mastery	Beginning Scores Correct	Error
Cohesive Paragraph		*15 points	7	1
Main Idea	Grades 5-6	8 correct responses	2	0

*Score includes 1 point each for topic sentence, relevant details, and conclusion

Chip attended a local public school and had completed the sixth grade. MASI test results measured the student's decoding skills and passage reading skills at the second grade level. Due to the weak decoding skills, comprehension skills were low, also. Results of the Woodcock Johnson Reading Mastery Test further documented specific reading skill area weaknesses: Word Identification - less than 2 percent, Word Attack - 6 percent, and Passage Comprehension - 3 percent. Baseline data scores revealed the following:

Table 2

Skill	Level	Criteria for Mastery	Beginning Scores Correct	Error
Cohesive Paragraph		*15 points	8	0
Main Idea	Grades 5-6	8 correct responses	2	1

*Score includes 1 point each for topic sentence, relevant details, and conclusion

Abner completed the sixth grade at a local private school for the emotionally handicapped. The student's parents preferred that no contact be made with the child's home school for any background information. MASI test results revealed that decoding skills were at the fifth grade level. The MASI comprehension test results placed Abner at the advanced level which is comparable to sixth to eighth grade levels. The scores of the IOWA Test of Basic Skills were: Vocabulary - 73 percent, Reading - 48 percent, and Language - 55 percent. Baseline data scores revealed the following:

Table 3

Skill	Level	Criteria for Mastery	Beginning Scores Correct	Error
Cohesive Paragraph		*15 points	8	0
Main Idea	Grades 5-6	8 correct responses	5	2
Drawing Conclusions	F	9 correct responses	4	1

*Score includes 1 point each for topic sentence, relevant details, and conclusion

Rhonda finished the fifth grade at a local private school. According to the MASI test results, the decoding skills of the student were at the fourth grade level, and the comprehension skills were at the intermediate level (comparable to fourth through fifth grade levels). School records were not provided. Through teacher observation, weaknesses were noted in the area of critical thinking. Baseline data scores revealed the following:

Table 4

Skill	Level	Criteria for Mastery	Beginning Scores Correct	Error
Cohesive Paragraph		*15 points	12	0
Inference	E	20 correct responses	15	5

*Score includes 1 point each for topic sentence, relevant details, and conclusion

Reading comprehension became the practicum topic since each student had average to low level comprehension skills. It was the author's contention that improved reading comprehension skills of detecting the main idea and drawing conclusions would increase the writing skills of the target population.

Higher level critical thinking skills were incorporated in this study as well.

The objectives for the practicum were as follows: after six weeks of instruction, the fifth and sixth graders will be able to:

1) read a passage and circle the main idea from a multiple-choice format at a rate of eight correct per minute.

2) write a cohesive paragraph including one topic sentence, 13 relevant details and one conclusion within a five-minute period given a story starter or picture stimulus.

In addition to these objectives for all of the fifth and sixth graders:

3) Abner will be able to read a passage at the appropriate level and mark the conclusion at a rate of nine correct per minute.

4) Rhonda will be able to read a passage at the appropriate level and mark the inference at a rate of twenty correct per minute.

CHAPTER II

Research and Solution Strategy

According to Raphael and Englert (1990) reading and writing are two largely invisible processes. A student would have a difficult time observing the sustained thinking involved in a teacher's writings or readings. It would be very helpful for the student to observe the manner in which the teacher organizes ideas, uses text structure knowledge to generate text, or predicts upcoming content in the teacher's readings and writings. In a recent study, Raphael and Englert defined a way to make the teacher's reading and writing processes more visible. By doing so, successful comprehension and independent writing were encouraged.

Planning Think Sheets

The teachers made the process visible through thinking aloud (modeling the teachers' writing and analysis of texts written by others), and by providing planning think sheets (Appendix A:47). Thinking aloud while modeling gave students an example of how a more

skilled writer or reader processes and analyzes informational text. This enabled the students to better understand the types of decisions that authors have to make while writing. The think sheets used different means of organizing graphs, used questions and statements that emphasized strategies relevant to different aspects of the writing process and to extracting information from the text when reading.

The four recurring phases according to Raphael and Englert (1990) which were emphasized in the instructional process were (a) text analysis, (b) modeling the writing process, (c) guiding students as they wrote, and (d) providing students with opportunities for independent writing. Text analysis was the first phase introduced where the link between writing and reading began. This first phase was essential in critiquing one's own writing and making any decisions to improve on it.

Once these students became aware of the importance of the analysis of the text, the second phase, modeling the writing process was introduced. The students were asked specific questions, such as, "What information is needed to be included in this writing?" It was explained to the students why making

notes on what the students were writing could be valuable.

Next, the third phase, guided writing, was introduced through the use of the think sheets. Teachers allowed the students to write papers on topics the students had chosen, using the text structure studied. On the think sheet the students were asked to write the main idea, brainstorming what the students already knew about the topic. Then the students were asked to group the ideas already known about the topic, putting these ideas into a certain order. After having time to edit these think sheets, the students made decisions about the changes needed to be made prior to the final draft.

The last phase, independent writing, had the students writing papers that involved the same structure as the one the students had seen modeled. These students showed growth in writing and comprehension. The growth was seen through improved sustained thinking and development of the students' own main ideas. Also, the students' abilities to evaluate the quality of text on the basis of meaning rather than form was observed.

According to Patricia Robbins (1990), reading and writing were considered integrated processes. Writing produces an enthusiasm for reading and reading does the same for writing. Children organize thoughts on to paper and analyze ideas when writing stories.

Semantic Mapping

According to the research of Peresich, Meadows, and Sinatra (1990), the cognitive mapping or semantic mapping strategy was used as the overall vehicle to bring about better comprehension on the part of the reader. By applying this strategy, the students were able to connect visual ideas to any prior knowledge of the topic.

The teachers were able to relate content ideas in a new and meaningful structure. The students observed the organization of a topic through mapping and the discussion of the topic with the group. These observations enabled the students to elaborate on and process the text in preparation for writing a theme (Peresich, Meadows, and Sinatra 1990).

By introducing these students to two special kinds of model mapping programs, the program structure showed students the relationship of superordinate,

coordinate, and subordinate ideas. This structure enabled the students to make relevant, meaningful connections to ideas in the students' own words.

To implement the cognitive mapping strategy, the teachers first had to conceptualize what was being presented to the students by connecting the major and minor ideas in different organization frameworks. Next, the students were asked to complete a blank map. This was done in one of two ways, the first way being to consider the central idea first. As the main ideas were discussed, the ideas were either accepted or rejected. If accepted, the ideas were written on the map. Once all the main ideas were determined, then the subordinate ideas were considered that related to each main idea.

The second way was to have the students complete one section of the map at a time. The students worked all the way through one main idea, its subordinate ideas, and any ideas relating to each subordinate idea before moving on to another main idea.

Another way that seemed to work was to distribute a blank map. Students silently read the text and organized the content according to the map. The

teacher then had the students write, reflecting the ideas written on the maps.

The last process of the writing stage was for the students to make use of the word processors and printers to make a final output of the writing. Teachers reported that throughout the mapping process, the students seemingly understood the content better through the discussion and writing that followed the mapping procedures.

Incorporating Comprehension Skills Via Mapping

To promote reading comprehension, Davis and McPherson (1989) explained how three processes existed within reading instruction: (a) prereading, (b) reading, and (c) postreading. In order to incorporate all three processes, Davis and McPherson explained the story map strategy. A story map was defined as a graphic representation of a story through the display of all elements and the relationship between the elements within a story.

The emphasis of story map instruction needs to be placed on the prereading stage since this stage is the motivational point to the student. However, the story map holds importance throughout the reading and

postreading stages also to prepare the students for the reading and to aid the students in reorganizing and retaining the information read.

The first step in beginning the construction of a story map is through brainstorming a list of potentially useful story elements. Secondly, once the list is completed, the list should be put into some kind of order. Thirdly, it needs to be decided what type of story map to construct (e.g. inferential, literal) based on the needs of the students. Next the main idea is placed in the center of the story map. All second level information pertaining to the main idea should project off the location on the story map which contains the main idea. Third-level information should branch from the information to which it most directly relates. Lastly, the story map should be judged to see how it might be modified according to the needs of the students (Appendix B:50).

It is important within story map instruction to use the prereading time to elicit information reflecting links between events and ideas that unify the story. Students should be allowed to develop ideas to activate prior knowledge and to become involved in predicting.

Story maps can be designed to help children understand that many times authors use unstated ideas or inferences in a story to get a point across. The story map can be constructed so as to reveal the ideas which were stated and those which were not.

In order to focus students' attention on drawing conclusions, the story map could be designed in such a manner to draw attention to conclusions the author has made within a story. Likewise, there may exist some conclusions that the author did not reveal. However, the reader might draw these conclusions from the information that the author has given.

Davis and McPherson cited that when story map instruction is introduced to students, judgment should be used. The teacher should not introduce too many things at one time. A simple model is a good one to begin with.

Many useful teaching strategies existed that enhanced children's evolving sense of story structure as observed by Smith and Bean (1983). Through the four strategies described, it was stated that primary grade children could comprehend story events and causes. These comprehension strategies enabled the children to author stories.

The four strategies described were (1) story patterns, (2) circle stories, (3) story pictures, and (4) Story Maker. Story patterns enabled the children to visualize the story structure by sketching the story in a vertical sequence. Circle stories used the same visual story structure, except the structure was drawn in a circle. The story pictures were used by making diagrams to represent different parts of the story. Lastly, the Story Maker used story structure in a more complex diagram through the use of a tree with many simultaneous story lines. This particular teaching strategy could be helpful if several levels of plots existed within the story. The Story Maker strategy could also be of benefit if the students brainstormed any new ideas prior to a particular writing experience.

Strategies To Develop The Main Idea & Conclusion

According to Obrand (1990), the following strategies were recommended regarding comprehending the main idea.

1. Students should write stories and exchange with peers to answer comprehension questions which the students developed. (The use of peers is an excellent

method of motivating the students to learn and a good way to change the learning environment).

2. After the teacher has removed the titles from newspaper articles, the students are asked to match the correct titles with the articles and explain why the matches were chosen. For independent learning, copies of the articles could be made prior to removing the titles. After all of the matches are made, the students could check the copies to see if the matches they made matched the original copies. This strategy is called match-to-sample.

3. Students could develop titles to the stories read.

Comprehension is described by Obrand through three levels. The first level provides literal information. Getting the main idea and supporting details exist within this level. The second level is the interpretive level where the specific information is not provided. Drawing conclusions and making inferences exist within this level. Lastly, the critical level provides an analysis of information. Prior to reading with meaning, comprehension at all three levels needs to take place.

According to Heilman, Blair, Rupley (1990) teaching the main idea was a most important feature when instructing comprehension. Modolfsky, as cited by Heilman, Blair, Rupley (1990), recommended five guidelines in teaching the main idea to students. The five guidelines were as follows:

1. The schemata of the students was activated through illustrations of problems and solutions from previous stories that the students related to.

2. The schemata of the students was organized by categorizing problems that occurred. Students were encouraged to develop their own ideas while reading.

3. The process of identifying the central theme of the story was modeled for the students. Two strategies used in the story of "The Three Little Pigs" were recall/compare and predict/justify.

4. The students needed opportunities to transfer and apply the information learned.

5. The students' strategies needed to be expanded for which no level of mastery exists. One example was to compare central problems through different means, such as the type of problem or type of solution.

Another example was to use concepts associated with expressive vocabulary to label characters (brave, cowardly) and build on those relationships between character traits, problems and solutions. By examining the setting and its effect on the story problems, the comprehension strategies of the students were expanded and developed.

The most important skill in comprehending a paragraph according to Dechant (1982) was to be able to identify the central idea in what was read. Pupils who did not understand main idea could not move on to understand implied meanings or to organize or summarize what was read.

Several methods were described by Dechant for understanding the main idea. One was to have pupils underline key words of a sentence. Another was to have the pupils select a topic sentence or sentence which best identified the main idea in a paragraph. A third method was to have the pupils restate the topic sentence using the pupils' own words. Asking the pupils to write a title for a paragraph was a fourth method suggested.

In research done by Hammill and Bartel (1990) direct instruction was important to teach

comprehension skills by having objectives clearly in mind prior to starting a lesson. The four steps suggested were introduction, direct instruction, teacher-direct application, and independent practice.

The introduction consisted of the teacher stating the purpose of the lesson. Direct instruction was the actual teaching when the teacher stated, manipulated, explained, requested, and demonstrated what was to be done. Teacher-directed application allowed the students to actually practice using several examples under the teacher's guidance. Independent practice was the step which allowed the students to work independently or in groups to reinforce the skill.

Another skill Hammill and Bartel stressed for understanding the meaning of what was read was through asking appropriate questions. Asking questions prior to reading a passage could motivate the students to stay alert to what was being read prior to the reading. Answering questions after reading a passage could help students understand and remember what was read.

Hammill and Bartel also suggested three exercises to use for individual follow-up to a group reading lesson on the main idea. The first exercise was for

the students to choose one phrase from a list of phrases given to the students by the teacher that best tells the main idea. Another idea was for the students to make up a title to a story the teacher read and tell why the title was a good one. Lastly, the teacher could ask the students to choose details from the story that supported the main idea and use a diagram to represent it.

How schools organized and delivered instruction to poor readers was the focus of research done by Gaskins (1988). Specifically, in regard to the manner in which specific skills (main idea, inferencing) were taught, the readers were given various workbook and worksheet activities regarding these skills. These poor readers were rarely given direct instruction regarding how to accomplish these skills.

Anderson, et. al., as cited by Gaskins (1988), felt that what the students needed was to be shown what to do, why the students were to do it, how to do it and when to apply it. Gaskins stated that this procedure could be followed through teacher modeling, teacher guided application, and the teacher's gradual release of responsibility to the students.

One example of direct instruction in inferencing is as follows. The teacher reviewed what an inference was (the combination of student's previous knowledge and that information in the text). Further explanation of inferencing was that the author many times does not state every detail of the story; however, the author's meaning relies on the student being able to figure out the author's meaning.

Next, the teacher modeled the thinking process used when making a specific inference by thinking out loud. Using the steps verbally of how the teacher combined information in the text with the teacher's prior knowledge gave the students an example of how to use the students' own background knowledge and apply it to the text.

The teacher then offered the students a chance to prepare any background knowledge through giving the students a specific topic to think about. A story having to do with the same topic was then read to the students. When the story was completed, the students were guided to apply the skill to make inferences about the story.

Wong-Kam and Au (1988) explained how classroom teachers can help poor readers better understand the written expression of ideas by using the classroom community of readers and writers together to find meaning in what the students read or write. In this particular setting, these students helped one another pull thoughts together to add meaning to the topics being discussed. The students expressed views concerning the author's actual meaning.

Learning guides were used to help the students understand what the students had read by writing down answers to questions. To further enhance the comprehension of the meaning within the story, the students wrote a paraphrase of the story. The teacher did not emphasize the mechanics of the writings, and accepted invented spellings or allowed the students to refer to the story for the spellings of words.

It was concluded in one article of research (Cairney, 1990) that all children are influenced in what is written by what was previously read, written, or heard. One way in which children created texts was from a composite set of prior textual experiences.

Precision Teaching

Due to the fact that learning is the objective of teaching, one of the most important instructional acts is effectively measuring those learning needs. Each student's performance should be assessed at least one time during each instructional session (West, Young, Spooner, 1990).

How can the learning of comprehension be measured? Precision teaching is one proven effective method of evaluating instructional tactics and curricula. Seven basic elements, which follow, made up the framework of precision teaching:

1. The student knew best in regards to whether or not instruction had been effective.

2. Direct measuring and monitoring of the student's behavior was emphasized.

3. Using the number of correct answers per minute was a universal measure of behavior.

4. In order to study patterns of performance, a standard chart format was used.

5. Certain descriptive and functional definitions of behavior and processes were used.

6. Ongoing analysis of the impact of teaching tactics on the individual performance was made.

7. An overall emphasis existed toward building positive behavior rather than focusing on the negative behavior.

Incorporating any of the suggested strategies should prove to be beneficial for a student to better understand what is read and written. Finding the most effective strategies to meet the individual needs of each student is very important. However, it would depend on the trial and error process, the attitude and learning capability of the student, and the effectiveness of the teacher. If the right formula can be found, the student can become very successful on the road to better comprehension.

CHAPTER III

Method

The purpose of this practicum was to research and implement strategies in comprehension and critical thinking skills to be incorporated into daily classroom instruction. Through reading professional literature and attending orientation meetings and weekly inservice training sessions, teaching strategies were selected to meet the objectives of the practicum.

During week one, tests were administered to collect diagnostic data regarding the students. From this data, common learning deficits were evident. Teaching strategies were planned to focus on the learning deficits of the students. A task sheet (Appendix C:52) was devised for use as a daily lesson plan to incorporate these teaching skills for each student.

The following strategies were implemented during the course of the six weeks.

Precision Teaching

The students completed enabling activities, daily, toward learning the specific targeted skills. At the end of each activity the students were timed and tested daily to monitor progress until each specific skill was mastered.

To ensure records were kept accurately, the students kept daily charts of progress to coincide with each specific skill to study patterns of performance (Appendix D:54). Continuous measurement of student performance was done by having the students keep progress records. Adjustments to the teaching strategies were made accordingly.

Use of Community of Readers & Writers Together

A book was read daily to the students, one chapter at a time, during the course of the six weeks. One main purpose in doing so was to allow discussion of the chapters which would incorporate the different backgrounds and knowledge of the students. This strategy enabled the students to learn not only from the teacher but from peers.

Many times the students were asked to discuss the main idea or ideas and supporting details from the

chapter read. These main ideas and supporting details were written on the board, or on newsprint, in an organized fashion so that the students could visualize how the main ideas and supporting details were used in the book.

Sometimes the students were asked to predict what the main idea was going to be prior to reading the chapter. At the conclusion of the reading, discussion took place to determine how accurate the predictions were. This enabled the students to link the use of predicting main ideas to the students' prior knowledge of what had happened in the story.

Modeling/Direct Instruction For Inferencing

Modeling was used to instruct the relationship of inferencing with background knowledge. The teacher explained what inferencing was and how it added color and personality to the writing. What the author meant depended on the reader being able to figure it out.

Inferencing was modeled in one of the teacher's own writings. Also, the thinking process the teacher went through when making a specific inference was demonstrated aloud. The teacher's prior knowledge was

brought into play with what the author actually stated in the text.

For example, to "spill the beans" did not mean that beans were actually spilled, but that someone told something that was not supposed to be told. It was then easier for the student to understand that many times the writer meant something different than what was actually stated.

The students were asked to practice, independently, what was learned about inferencing by making up a story using another figurative expression and writing that story illustrating the figurative expression chosen. (Appendix E:56)

Students were asked to listen to a story for unstated ideas that the author implied. The teacher helped guide the students to see the difference in ideas that were stated versus ideas that were not.

Process Writing

The students were asked to write each day (Appendix F:59). The content of the writing was determined through the students' choice of subject matter. Allowing the students' choice of subject matter enabled the students to write more about the

topic from which the students were familiar. The particular idea from the students' own personal experiences or background knowledge could then be expanded upon.

The students were asked to organize any thoughts and ideas into a main idea and supporting details. Five minutes were allotted for the students to write about these thoughts and ideas. Spelling and handwriting were not stressed. However, organization, clarity of expression, and mechanics of writing were stressed.

After the initial writing, the students were given the chance to share what was written with peers. The stories were then read aloud. Students were encouraged to revise and edit the initial writings.

Comprehension Activities

Prior to or concluding the daily readings, students were asked to make up titles of the chapters. Group discussion focused on whether the made up titles were valid or not.

Students were asked to follow an idea in a story through the use of circle stories or story pictures. The students were given the nursery rhyme, "Little

Miss Muffett." Diagrams were drawn on a piece of paper to represent the different story parts in the order by which they occurred. (Appendix G:61)

Newspaper articles were brought in with the titles eliminated. The articles were distributed to the students. Titles were also distributed at random. Students read the articles and matched the appropriate titles to the articles.

Cartoons were brought in. If the cartoon was divided into six segments, these six segments were cut apart and all mixed up. The students were asked to read each of the segments and put the cartoons back together in the proper sequence.

Brainstorming/Use of Questions

Many times the topics to be written about were previewed and discussed. An overall cooperative effort to discuss or brainstorm any ideas or prior knowledge about the topic was encouraged. All ideas were considered valid ones and the students were not allowed to criticize each other's ideas.

The use of brainstorming helped stimulate and motivate the group prior to the actual writing. Questions were asked to encourage any further ideas

from the group. By the students collectively thinking out loud, more information was brought to the group, and new knowledge was gained. The students could then use the ideas which had been discussed for the five minute writing.

Story Map Strategy

Story maps (Appendix B:50) were used to provide practical means for the students' organization of the story content once a topic had been brainstormed. For example, once the students began to brainstorm the idea of frogs, certain categories stood out, such as, "characteristics," "habitats," "food," and "movement" of the frog.

All ideas brought out by the students were written down. The main idea was placed in the center. The second level information projected off the main idea and so on.

The reading about frogs was then read to the students. After the reading, the students were asked to add any new information which was added to the already constructed story map.

Cognitive Mapping/Semantic Mapping

The teacher created a visual map for the students to complete regarding a central theme or topic (Appendix H:63). There were different boxes for the main ideas and connecting boxes to place the subordinate ideas. The teacher verbally arranged the ideas into these categories so the students could visualize how the ideas which were read or written about were connected. Students could construct meaning from the text by breaking down the text in this manner.

Graphs

Different graphs were used to display or help to outline a particular topic. For example, by using the spider map (Appendix I:65), the students were able to display the main idea and supporting details. The five minute writing was written according to this outline.

Planning Think Sheet

The students were asked to write instructions on how to do something (i.e., how to ride a bike, play a violin). A planning think sheet (Appendix A:47) was used for the students to plan out what would be written.

Questions were asked on the planning think sheet. Students needed to decide and answer the following questions on the planning think sheet: Who would be learning to do what was being taught? What information was being instructed? What was already known about the topic? How were the ideas grouped? What materials would the reader need when learning to do what was being taught? What steps needed to occur to complete the task? What problems might be expected to take place during the learning process? What ideas did the writer want to use for the introduction and conclusion?

The answers to these questions were written on the planning think sheet. The students were allowed to then use the information to write on the topic for five minutes.

Use of Questions and Answers

The students were asked to choose a topic to write about for five minutes. At the conclusion of the writing, the students wrote three questions which could be answered within the five minute writing. These stories and corresponding questions were exchanged with other students to read and answer. (Appendix J:67)

Another strategy was used with questions and answers. As different topics were discussed throughout the day, questions were asked to test the students' comprehension and critical thinking skills. Even as students were writing, many times the teacher would use questions to permit the students to think about what was being written.

One such example of the use of comprehension questions was one where the students listened to a reading about the state of Florida. At the conclusion of the reading, the students were asked several questions to check the listening skills for main idea and details. This was done prior to the five minute writing regarding this subject.

Use Of Computer

Students were allowed to choose one of their writings. Through the use of a computer, the writing was revised and edited, typed and displayed in the classroom. (Appendix K:70)

In conclusion, these methods provided positive opportunities for practicing comprehension skills through writing. After reading the students' writings, it was easier to observe which comprehension skills were utilized by the students and which ones were not. Writings contained increased creativity and more interesting content. Also noted were more spontaneous and more fluent writings. With the practice of comprehension skills through writing came increased understanding of the main idea, inferencing, and conclusion, all at the same time.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Results of the specified outcome objectives at the completion of the project implementation were compared with the data collected on the students' performances before the strategies were applied. The following results occurred:

Kyle, Chip, Abner, and Rhonda were all four working towards the goal of writing a cohesive paragraph. All students improved with increased total number of points for each topic sentence, relevant details, and conclusion used in the writings. Only Kyle and Abner, however, were able to meet the stated objective.

The second objective was for Kyle, Chip, and Abner to be able to read a passage and circle the main idea. Kyle and Abner were able to meet the stated objectives. Chip made great progress, but did not quite attain the objective.

A third objective was for Abner to read a passage and mark the conclusion. Abner did attain and pass the set goal.

The last objective for the eight weeks was for Rhonda to be able to read a passage and mark the inference. Rhonda was not able to attain this goal.

Kyle

Kyle was very conscientious and worked very hard. Kyle's writings were enhanced by use of picture stimuli and the community of readers and writers together. Specified outcome objective scores revealed the following:

Table 5

Skill	Level	Criteria for Mastery	Beginning Scores C	Beginning Scores E	Ending Scores C	Ending Scores E
Cohesive Paragraph		*15 points	7	1	8	0
Main Idea	Grades 5-6	8 correct responses	2	0	8	0

*Score includes 1 point each for topic sentence, relevant details, and conclusion

Chip

Chip responded extremely well to the monitoring system of precision teaching. When any improvement was made, Chip became more persistent in succeeding and was extremely motivated toward reaching the set aims.

Noticable improvement was made when comparing Chip's initial writings with the final ones. The main improvement was observed in Chip's effort, and in the quality and cohesiveness of the writings. The main idea and supporting details were much clearer. Specified outcome objective scores revealed the following:

Table 6

Skill	Level	Criteria for Mastery	Beginning Scores C	Beginning Scores E	Ending Scores C	Ending Scores E
Cohesive Paragraph		*15 points	8	0	13	0
Main Idea	Grades 5-6	8 correct responses	2	1	7	2

*Score includes 1 point each for topic sentence, relevant details, and conclusion

Abner

Abner responded well to the brainstorming method and the writing practices. These methods brought out a tremendous amount of creativity and motivation within Abner more than other methods. Specified outcome objective scores revealed the following:

Table 7

Skill	Level	Criteria for Mastery	Beginning Scores C	Beginning Scores E	Ending Scores C	Ending Scores E
Cohesive Paragraph		*15 points	8	0	25	1
Main Idea	Grades 5-6	8 correct responses	5	2	10	0
Drawing Conclusions	F	9 correct responses	4	1	12	0

*Score includes 1 point each for topic sentence, relevant details, and conclusion

Rhonda

Rhonda made some improvement in writing a cohesive paragraph. The writings were filled with many ideas and much creativity.

Rhonda did not make progress toward mastering the set aim for inferencing. Rhonda lacked organizational skills and the ability to be more conscientious about productive. Many times the student would carelessly hurry through the day's work, making many unnecessary mistakes. These facts combined with the fact that Rhonda missed many days of school might account for a lack of achievement.

Specified outcome objective scores revealed the following:

Table 8

Skill	Level	Criteria for Mastery	Beginning Scores C	Beginning Scores E	Ending Scores C	Ending Scores E
Cohesive Paragraph		*15 points	12	0	14	0
Inference	E	20 correct responses	15	5	12	2

*Score includes 1 point each for topic sentence, relevant details, and conclusion

Even the writer showed improvement in knowledge of diagnosis, teaching strategies, management techniques, and monitoring and analyzing data. During the course of the eight weeks a pre-test and posttest were administered. The object was to increase correct responses by 50 percentage points. The pre-test score was 13, and the posttest score was 92, resulting in a 79 point improvement.

In evaluating the results, the precision teaching system, brainstorming, planning think sheets, different mapping strategies, and the process writing method were especially useful tools in motivating the students to meet the stated objectives.

CHAPTER V

Recommendations

Within the framework of the practicum setting, several of the teaching strategies used were successful. After the results of the four students' scores were evaluated, the following recommendations are suggested.

Precision teaching was one strategy that worked well within the small setting of students. Precision teaching provided a challenging and positive incentive for the students to do well by monitoring individual daily progress within each skill. It is recommended that this system continue to be utilized.

Brainstorming enabled the students to share and build on each other's thoughts and ideas. When one student did not understand main idea, conclusion, or inference, another student did, and many times explained it in a different way so that the first student came to an understanding of the concept. It is advised that this particular method be continued.

Another recommendation with the writing process is to offer the students more time for editing and rewriting an initial draft. By building and developing the first writing over several lessons, the students should be able to compare the first draft with the final writing and see how the writings differ. Once students understand how the writings are different, future writings should improve.

Teaching the concepts of inferencing, main idea and drawing conclusions can play an important part in the improvement of writing skills. Once students grasp an understanding of these concepts, the students' writings are likely to become more cohesive. Better organization patterns in the writings can develop. By observing the students' writings, the teacher can visually critique any areas of weakness or strength and observe any signs of improvement.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Planning Think Sheet

Planning Think Sheet

Author's Name _____ Date _____

TOPIC: Coin Collecting

WHO: Who am I writing for? Everyone

WHY: Why am I writing this? For people who are interested in coins

WHAT: What do I already know about my topic? (Brainstorm)

1. You find over old coins in coin collec.
2. You buy coins at coin stores if you need it.
3. Old coins range from 2¢ to $20,000
4. Coins are fun to collect.

HOW? How do I group my ideas?

Materials I'll need	Steps
Lot of money	You buy a coin book.
time	Move up + ben you get it.
smarts - brains	Get books on coins
books on it	

Things that happened when it was taking place	Beginning + ending ideas
There is to visit up	
Fun to look at	
Good history	
learning	

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Plan think sheet

Author's name Mrs. D Date

TOPIC: Making Peanut Butter Fudge

WHO: Who am I writing for?
Parents, brothers, sisters, + friends of my students

WHY: Why am I writing this?
So my students can make peanut butter fudge at home,
↓ so we can remember how we made it in school

WHAT: What do I already know about my topic? (Brainstorm)
we made it after lunch

1. peanut butter — Matthew got the first piece
2. chocolate — used an 8" pan (or 9x9x2)
3. measuring cups — taste great!!! — taking turns stirring
4. Cosette got to lick the spoon / clean / salt / sugar / wooden spoons / glass bowls / need patience, stirring it was a surprise

HOW: How do I group my ideas?

Materials I'll need	Steps
Chocolate - 2 ounces hot plate, bowls, wooden spoons aprons, buttered pans peanut butter 2 cups sugar measuring cups	melt chocolate + peanut butter take turns stirring add things put in refrigerator
Things that happened when we made it	**Beginning + ending ideas**
Cosette licked the spoon We put on aprons & took turns we ate fudge at recess →	taste great!! ← Matthew took the first bite we wanted to make it again

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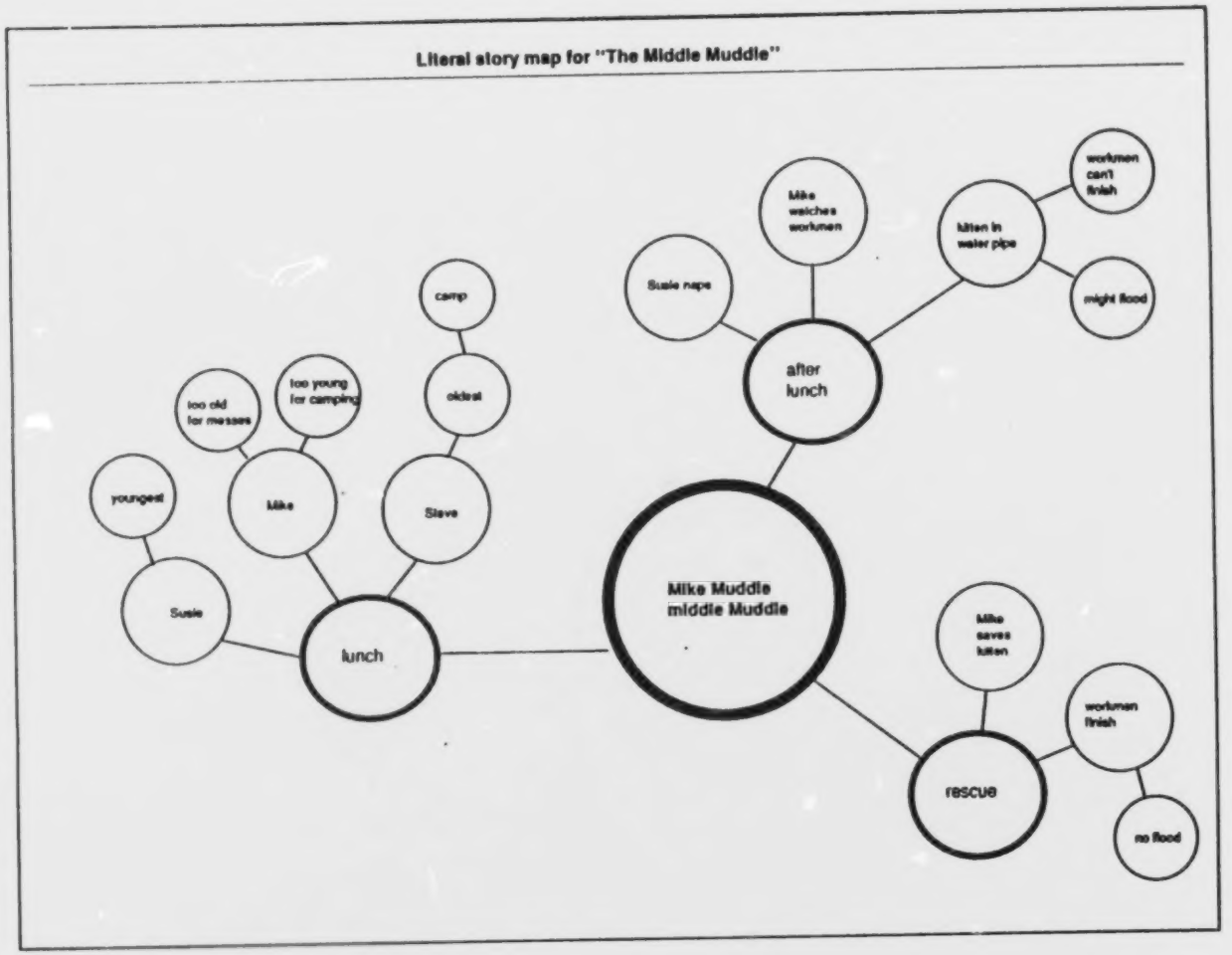
Appendix B

Story Map


Literal story map for "The Middle Muddle"
Mike Muddle middle Muddle
lunch
Susie
youngest
Mike
too old for messes
too young for camping
Steve
oldest
camp
after lunch
Susie naps
Mike watches workmen
kitten in water pipe
workmen can't finish
might flood
rescue
Mike saves kitten
workmen finish
no flood

Appendix C

Task Sheet

TODAY THINGS TO DO

Date 7/9/90 Name _____ Done

1 DLM sentence parts 3,4 ☑

2 See picture. Write story. ☑

3 Versa Tiles - Multiplication - pages 26.27 ☑

4 Rainbow II - Multiplication facts - page 36, 37 M-11b ☑

5 See 2D multiplication. Write. ☑
Un-Scramble sentences envelope. ☑

6 NIM with Mrs. Covey 2 minutes. ☑
Tachistoscopes That's My Car-1 ☑

7 See story. Read. ☑

8 Rainbow II - Sight Word Skills - pages 4-5 ☑
Insta Learn Stepboard - Box 5 ☑

9 Fokes sentences - Write 5 on board. ☑

10 See sight word - Say. Dolch 2-1 ☑

11 Rainbow II - Beginning word problems Page 7-9 ☑

12 See word problems - Write. WP-13 ☑

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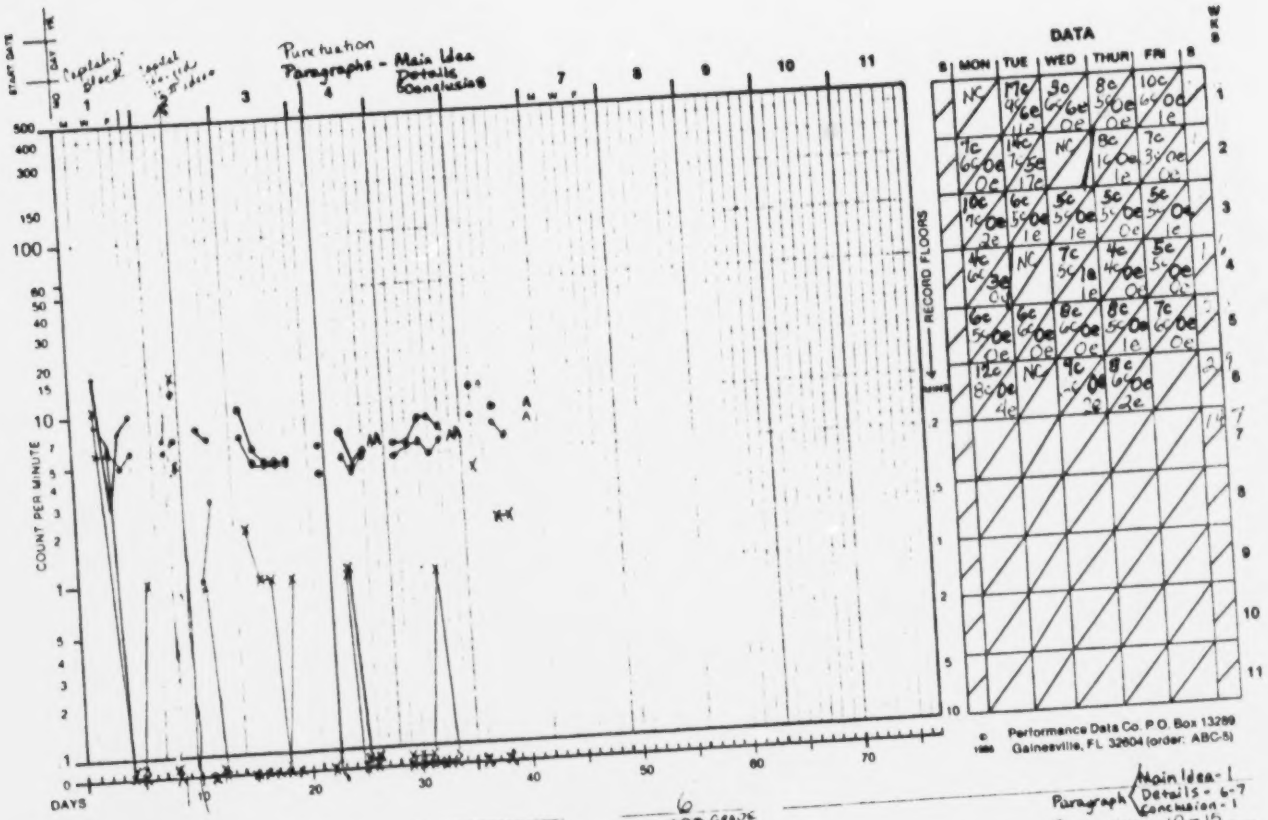
Appendix D

Daily Progress Chart



NAME SEE PICTURE - WRITE STORY

PINPOINT

Punctuation - RED

Ideas - BLACK

6 GRADE

Paragraph { Main Idea - 1 / Details - 6-7 / Conclusion - 1

Punctuation - 10 - 15

AIM

Appendix E

Sample of Figurative Expression

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Don't Laugh Your Head Off

Inference

Story #1

It was time for my recital. There wa a <u>frog in my throat</u>. I stood up, took a deep breath, and played my solo on the violin. The <u>frog in my throat</u> went away. When I finished playing my solo, the audience applauded.

Figurative Expressions

frog in my throat	• put your best foot forward
on pins and needles	• beat around the bush
spill the beans	• eat his words
money to burn	• chip on your shoulder
drop me a line	• butterflies in your stomach
keep your chin up	• written all over your face
take the floor	• wake up on the wrong side of the bed

Directions:

1. Please rewrite story #1.
2. Replace the underlined words with a literal expression.
3. Make up your own story, using another figurative expression on the list or one of your own.
4. Make an illustration of the figurative expression you choose.

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My toy is stolen
who stole it. Not
me said Ricky. it is
written all over
your face.

Appendix F

Writing Sample

60

Coins

I started collecting [illegible]
when I was eleven. I began collecting
[illegible] I was mad or had up to [illegible]
[illegible] coins. Coins range from [illegible] to [illegible]
Coins are great to look at and each
coin has fascinating history. [illegible]
are great investments. Also, the value
[illegible] are on the condition of the coin. The better
[illegible] it is, the more valuable. Coins are fun
[illegible] to collect.

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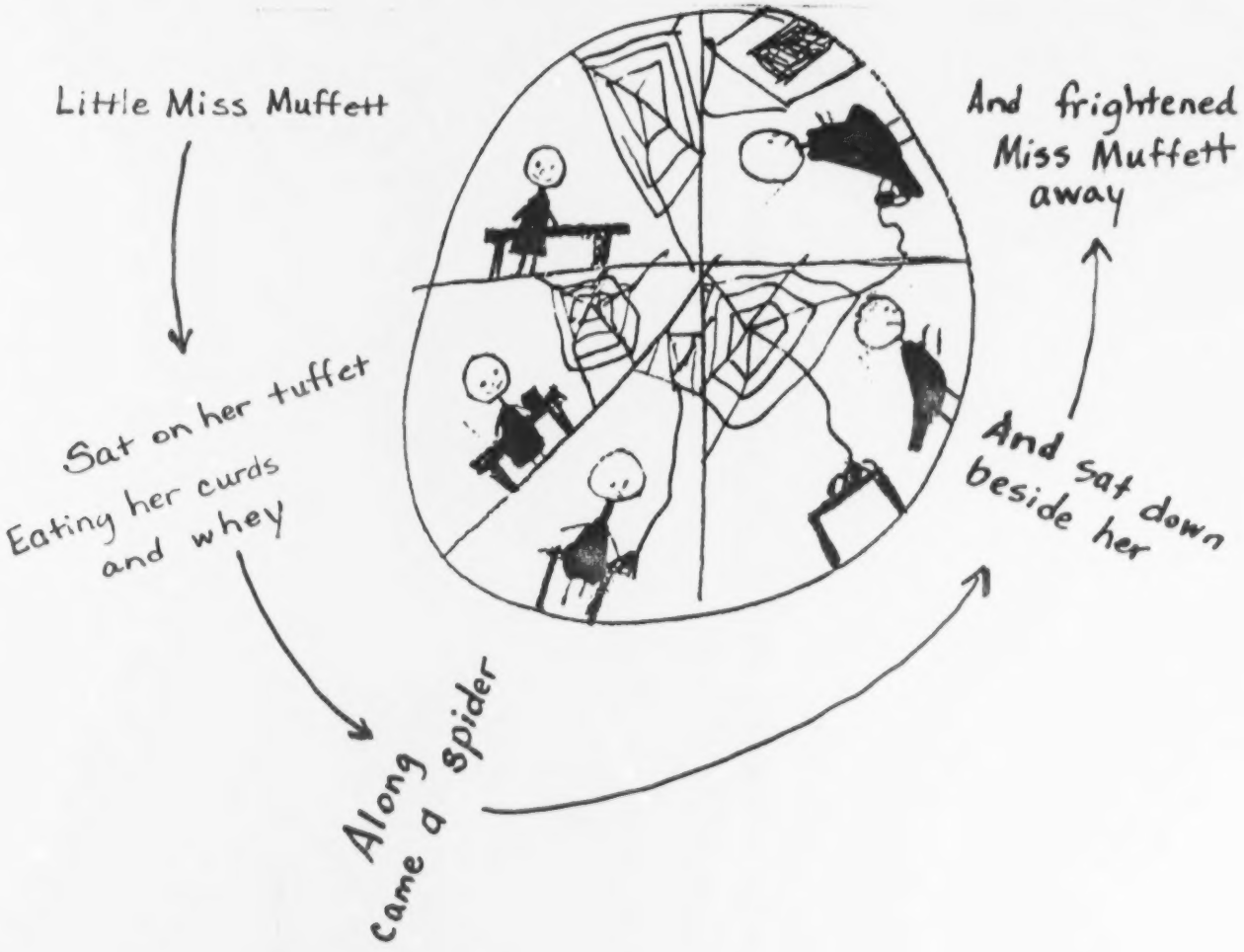
Appendix G

Circle Story Diagram


Little Miss Muffett
Sat on her tuffet
Eating her curds and whey
Along came a spider
And sat down beside her
And frightened Miss Muffett away

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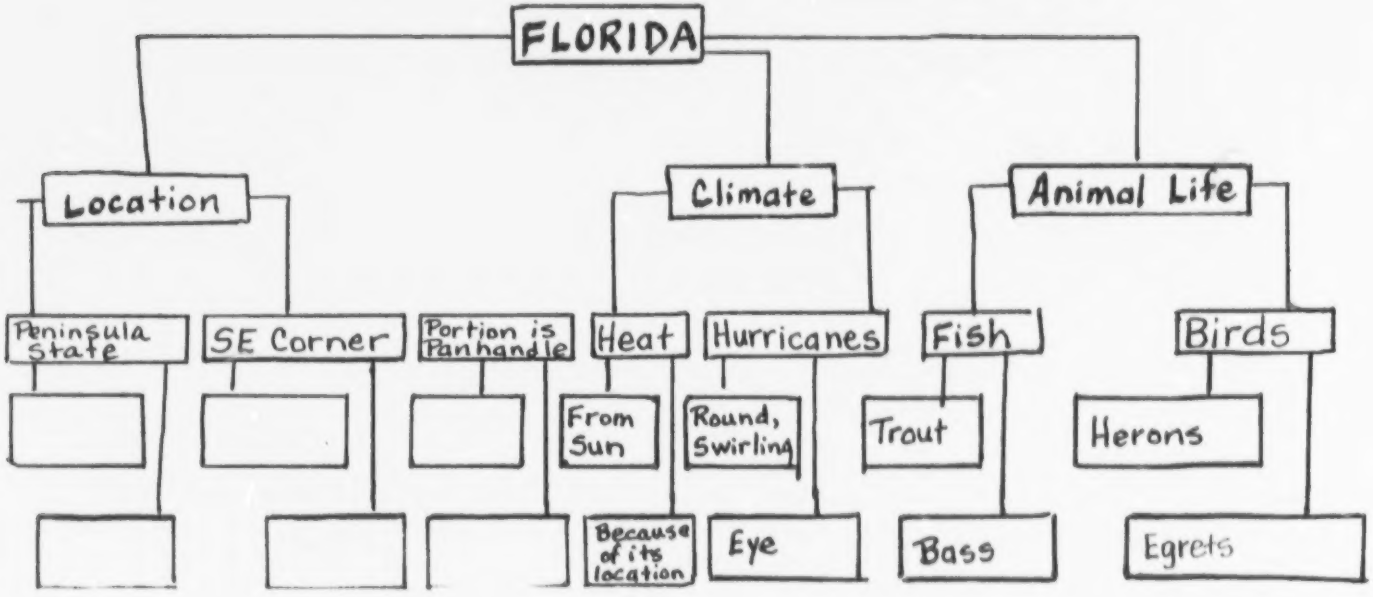
Appendix H

Cognitive/Semantic Map

64

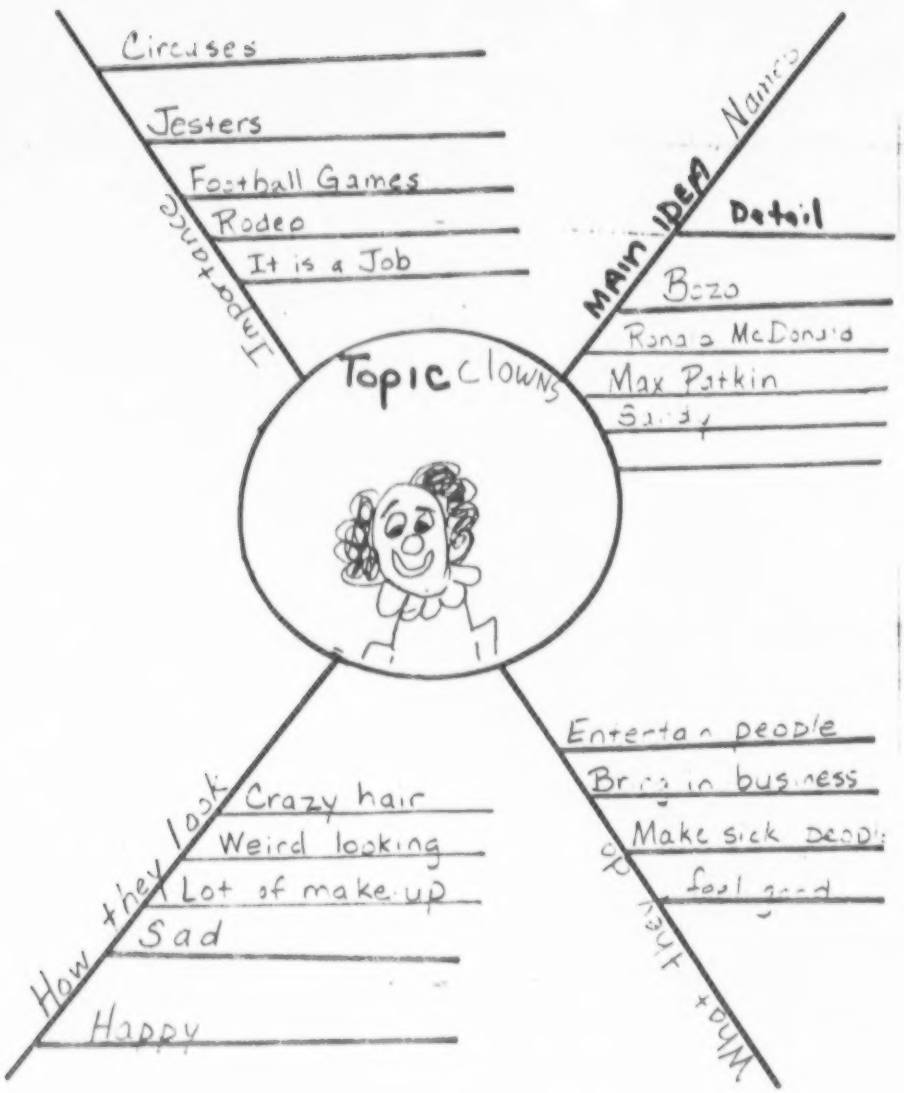
Cognitive/Semantic Map



Appendix I

Spider Map

Spider Map



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Appendix J

Sample Story with Questions and Answers

MONKEY SEE

MONKEY DO

Monkeys are creatures very much like humans. Monkeys are extremely smart animals. They normally live at either homes, zoos, jungles, and forests. Monkeys have strong tails that they hang on. Monkeys also have long arms and long tails short-haired monkeys are much easier to take care of than long hairy monkeys. Short-haired monkeys don't shed as much as long haired monkeys. Monkeys are one of the most interesting, funny, loveable, and smart animals.

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How are monkeys like humans?

Where do monkeys live?

Why are short haired monkeys better than long haired monkeys?

Monkeys have long what?

1. Monkeys are more [illegible] smart animals

2.

3.

4. tails and arms.

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Appendix K

Sample Computer Writing

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When I came home, I got ready to go swimming. I was swimming and timing myself under water. I saw a 15' foot alligator going in my pool! I held my breath for one hour. My dad came out and saw the alligator. He got his gun and shot him. We had gator tall for dinner